

["Singin' Praises Dat's My Life, Lawd"]

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SOUTH CAROLINA WRITERS' PROJECT

LIFE HISTORY

TITLE: "SINGIN' PRAISES DATS' MY LIFE LAW'D"

Date of First Writing February 17, 1939

Name of Person Interviewed Emma Sanders (Negro)

Street Address #1 E. Henrietta St.,

Place Union, S. C.

Occupation Cook

Name of Writer Caldwell Sims, Union, S. C.

Name of Reviser State Office

"Law'd, Honey I wuz born down on Mr. William Tucker's place and I sho' thought ev'ybody know'd dat. Him and Mr. Epps Tucker wuz two cousins. Mr. Epps never had no fine house like Mr. William. Mr. William built his'self a mansion, dat he sho' 'nough did. Honey, ain't you never seed Mr. William's house whar Miss Ada lived atter she married Mr. Garrett? God bless her sweet soul, she sho' is one fine white lady dat dis nigger gwine to love 'til her dyin' day, yes, Lawd, dat I will. C10 - 1/31/41 - S.C.

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I went by Tucker from de very furs' day I wuz born 'til 'Luck' come along and married me. Jesus, how I would like to see my old home. 'Ada', on de Seaboard Airline Railroad, wuz named fer Miss Ada , Mr. William Tucker's sister.

“When Mr. William Tucker married he had two places; his upper place wid de house on it; and the lower place dat jined it wuz called the Holmes Place, because he bought it from old Dr. Holmes. Dat [?] road gwine by thar is called the 'Old Otterson Fort Road.'

“All de time I lived on dat place I never done nothin' but played wid my rag dolls. I has allus been fat and jolly. My ma used to chafe me fer laughin' out loud when I seed grown folks. Pa worked fer standin' wages year in and year out. But when I got about eight years old Pa moved from de Tucker place to Tom Jeter's place. We knows dat now by de 'Dr. Bates' place. Pa kept on workin' dar fer standin' wages, \$8, a month and our rations. We never suffered tho' fer a thing in dem days. White folks wuz rich, and dey kept dey hands fat and slick, jest as much as dey did dey hogs and horses.

“We lived har fer thirty years. My parents died har. Den me and Mango Sanders married har. When we moved har ma sent me to school. I never had been to school a day in my life. 'Members dat fust day in school as well as if'n hit wuz yestidy. Ma fixed me in a red and white candy-striped dress. One of my sisters carried me 'long wid her to school. Honey, I wuz the skeer'des little gal you e'er seed. When 3 we go in de schoolhouse, de teacher said 'Good morning.' I giggled. She hit a stick on de table and said, 'Set down and stop dat grinnin' at me, you is in school now.' She wuz old lady Phyllis Jeter's grown gal, and she wuz mean. I wuz allus skeered of her, and I never did take in no l'arnin'. We set down kaise we had done walked three miles. Ma had done gived me a lunch and I thought she told me to eat hit as soon as I got to school. So when I set down I started eatin' my lunch. De teacher seed me tryin' to git my sister to eat and she hollered, 'Emma, git up and go out in de yard.' As I went by her she lashed me wid a hickory switch, and I runn'd

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out'n dat door hollerin'. I went on down in de woods and set down on a log, and when I got through hollerin' I et may lunch and went home.

"Quick as I seed ma I let out a great bawl. She came atter me and axed me if my sister's been fightin' me again. I told her, no, but de teacher had, and I wuz not wine gwine to school no mo'. Ma went up to de big house and told old lady Phyllis how her gal had done me. She had me holdin' up my arm so's old Phyllis could see de red mark on it. Old lady Phyllis made a great 'miration over it and 'low' dat she wuz gwine to give dat gal a round when she got home.

"I never did much at school but played in the pine woods. But de school whar I went to wuz in de yard of St. Luke's Church. When I went to school I stayed from nine o'clock in de morning till four in the evenin', and most of de day I spent playing ball or somethin', kaise I allus made my teacher mad so she 4 would send me out. Jest de same I has allus been in luck. All de luck's in de Lawd; and all de conduct's in us.

"Old man Alf Wright came to visit my white folks. He lived up in Union. He wuz some kin to my white folks. When he come down in de country he would stay all summer. He drunk a lot of coffee. My fust job wuz parchin' and grindin' coffee. I never will fergit it, dat's de fust money I made. Mr. Wright called me 'Little Fat Gal'. He gived me a quarter eve'y Saturday while he wuz down thar. I parched dat coffee and turned hit wid a crank. When hit wuz done parched I let it cool. While it wuz coolin' I'd be out playin'. Den I come in an' grind it up. The coffee mill had a drawer. When dat drawer wuz full I emptied the ground coffee in a wood tub wid a top to shut hit up wid. 'Members hit as food good as if'n 'twas dis morning. Lawd, have mercy, Jesus, it sho' puts me in de mind of shoutin' when I think about dem good olden days, yes, Lawd, it sho' do. Mr. Wright wuz a good old bachelor. He made me dance fer him while he fiddled - and he fiddled might nigh all his spare time, and dat wuz all de time.

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"Den as I growed up, Mr. Wright never came no mo', and he married and had two chilluns in his old days. I seed his wife jest once. She and her little chaps visited in the country and I seed them, too. She wuz a mighty fine-looking white lady wid quality about her. Mighty fine-looking children, too, jest like deir mother.

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"Cose growing up ain't nothin' 'cept what all de chilluns does. And I would'n have de time dese har gals has now. Dese har gals doesn't know nothin' 'bout a good time. When a boy walks wid 'em twice, why, they think he's ready to marry. Dats all de sense dey got. Lawdy, I is allus atter 'em 'bout hit, dey don't know no good time. Dey thinks dat dey known what a good times is made fer, but dey sho' don't. Dey don't dance like us did when we wuz young. You never hear-d no racket behind us. Dat's all follows de good time, is a racket. I hates rackets, but I like good times. Dese gals fools 'round too much and dey gits burnt! Best not to fool 'round too rotten much no time, yes, dat it is! Dese boys ruin dese gals by doin' things dat de gals thinks dey won't.

"Lawdy, honey, I went to frolics and stayed out 'til six in the morning. Boys fetched me home in de saddle and dey set behind. Still I kept ahead of 'em. All de gals I runn'd wid done de same way. Now gals can't keep ahead of boys and dey don't have to ride no mules either. Dats only time a boy got his arm around me, den he kept it in de right place. Mango fetched me home from frolics fer three years and he never found out nothin' 'bout me. Other boys tried to do the same and dey never made no progress. I ain't never found out what Mango's old mule wuz named. Dat de onliest thing he kept me guessin' on. You is got to keep dem a guessin', kaise all mens is got a streak of cussedness in 'em.

"Finally, when Mango married me, dey started to callin' him 'Luck'. Dey still calls him dat. His pa got to callin' him 6 'Luck' a fore he died. I rid all o' Sanders' (dats what I calls him de mo'es) old mules 'cep'n dat one in de yard now. I ain't never found out what dat mule's

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name is neither, and I don't believe he knows himself. Sanders calls him anythin' dat come to his mind and dat mule keeps agwine on."

Emma sees a large black woman going by and while she is going into her tobacco sack of Golden Grain she hollers, "Big Baby', how's you coming 'long wid dat supper fer de 'Busted Chapel'?" Big Baby shakes her head and looks belligerently at Emma and exclaims, "Who dat talkin' 'bout our church dat way? Our church is St. Paul's Baptist, and dat's all we gwine to let any nigger call hit." The ducks and geese in Emma's yard quack and cackle as "Big Baby" departs. She looks around and says, "All you niggers dat wants a good supper come over dar to de church tonight." Emma knocks her old cob pipe clean and refills it with fresh tobacco - Golden Grain. She said that other kinds of tobacco give her short wind. She studies while she puts her sack away and lights her pipe. Then she drops into a low tone and says, "I never bothers with no cigarettes. 'Luck' smokes cheap cigars, kaise he thinks he is always 'lucky'."

A gander comes out and begins fighting the drake duck. "Look at dat old gander. He is so mean, and I gits right mad at him." She throws a stick of stove wood at the gander that causes him to run to his puddle of water. "Looks at my geese, dey is the puritiest scenery I got. I likes deir eyes, so blue. Sanders likes dat big drake kaise he got such a green nake. Sanders 'low dat all dat green make him look like a parr't.

"If I'd let dat nigger he would fetch one of dem parr't har, but I don't need narry a bird to talk. When hits talkin' to do 'round har, I'll do hit myself." She claps her hands together and laughs, "My pipe is 7 gwine now, but had to beat hit like I wuz beatin' a pan tho' afo' hit got to gwine good. See my washin'. Rain driv' me to be late wid my washin' dis week.

"Jesus, have Mercy, if there ain't 'Big Baby' hangin' her clothes out. Dat supper fer de Busted Chapel mus' not gwine to be so hot. Rev. Smith wuz preachin' gwine into five years at Sain' Paul's on Wallace Street, over dar by de ice factory. See dat steeple? Well, dat's hit. Rev. Smith sho' wuz a fine-lookin' black man wid a long twisted moustache. He had

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a fine wife too, but not no chilluns. He could allus git the mourners' bench so full dat hit would creak. His conflagration (congregation) never paid him much. So when he got a call to Spartanburg he 'cided to go sudden like so he told his people. Dey never wanted him to leave Union, so he 'cided dat de Lowd meant fer him to stay har.

“Bout a year had done went by when fer some reason hit got to gwine 'round dat Rev. Smith wuz too 'sporty'. His wife never believed hit and she wuz fixin' to have her fust baby. But one of the Rev. Smith's deacons wuz dat jealous of him, dat he called a deacon's meeting and dey 'cided dat dey wuzn't gwine to pay Rev. Smith no mo' money. As Rev. Smith wuzn't dar he never got no wind. So he preached on in de name of de Lawd fer a nother year wid'out pay. Well you knows how things leaks out. So Spartanburg hear'd 'bout hit and dey calls Rev. Smith agin. By dat time his baby boy is crawlin' and hollerin' fer his cooter bones, and his pa has done found out dat de devil is settin' on his pews at Sain' Paul's so he 'cepts de Spartanburg call.

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“He preaches his farewell sermon and tells de righteous dat dar is mansions in de sky fer dem, and to dem other niggers dat has 'bused his name, he points out to dem dat dey shall burnt in de brimstone and fire thirteen times. Yet dat don't git him no money. So when he goes to Spartanburg he sues Sain' Paul's Chapel. Dat been eight years past. Dem niggers ain't spent no money on Sain' Paul's since. Dey still 'tends church, but dey is lettin' hit fall might nigh down. Dey tells dem lawyers dey is busted and brings dem to see de church in need of repairs. So ever since den the Methodists calls the Sain' Paul de 'Busted Chapel.' Dat makes dem mad tho', and dat's why 'Big Baby' twist herself 'round so and say what she did.

“Zion Methodist asked Rev. Smith to come down har three weeks back and preach dey night sermon to dem. He come and fetched his wife and boy. All three of dem wuz dressed up and he had a new car. Zion never helt de niggers dat turned out to hear Rev. Smith. He 'lowed in his sermon dat de Lawd gwine to help dem lawyers push dat judgment through,

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and he wuz gwine to git his money. Ev'ybody grunted a low 'Amen' when he said dat. He is a fine preacher and his church up in Spartanburg is proud of him.

"The 'Busted Chapel' members has gived two hot suppers since Rev. Smith preached at Zion. Dis'n tonight is the second. They has good things to eat, and of course, they makes money, as ev'ything fer the supper is gived free.

"Robert Moment is de younges' deacon. He muz workin' at Mr. Lewis Perrin' Drug Store and he got on the chainging fer stealin' out'n dat white man's store. Last week he come home from de gang and now he's gwine 'round wid a 'scription list trying to git money fer Rev. Smith's salary dat last year he preached.

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"Janie is beatin' dem all. She got a list, and she cooks fer Miss Gaffney. So Miss Gaffney gived her a dollar and a lot of rations fer dat fust supper. Janie went 'round to all dem rich white folks houses 'round Miss Gaffney's and Mr. Bolton's gittin' money and dey gived her a big 'scription. So maybe Rev. Smith won't git to put dem deacons in de 'Busted Chapel' in jail atter all. As fer me, I is gwine to de supper tonight, but ev'y day I sings praises, der dat's my life, Lawd!

"I ain't never made no money 'cept'n when I cooked fer Miss Bobo three years. She gived me \$2.50 a week. I got little things I need wid hit, and paid my 'surance (insurance). I nursed Miss Anne Bolton when she wuz a year old and her pa gived me a house and paid me \$3 a week. Mis' Bolton - she gived me all my clothin'. Then I went to Miss Josephine Jennings' and lived in her back yard fer fifteen years. Mango worked de gardens and dey gived us vittles and \$10 a month. All us got is 'surance. He got some and I'se got some.

"Once Miss Josephine took me to Toledo, Ohio, wid her. We stayed wid her friends dar a month. One day her friend got me to wash and iron her clothes fer her and she gived me \$3. I bought me a Sunday dress wid hit. Dat night hit wuz so hot Miss Josephine's chilluns couldn't sleep, so de lady took us on de trolley to a park fer miles away. We stayed dar 'til

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atter midnight. Miss Josephine come home in two days. When Miss Jospeline and her husband, Mr. Harry Jennings went to Georgia, Mr. Harry took the money me and 'Luck' had and brought this house. 'Luck' goes up to the courthouse and Mr. Bedenbaugh axes him a few questions and 'Luck' gives him de money fer taxes. Hit is in my name, Emma Sanders, but 'Luck' got hisself our furniture and dat old mule. He got our furniture and mule down fer \$20.

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"I don't never git no money no mo', Sanders works white folks's gardens and plows dey land wid dat old mule. He fetches me a little money when he has any. I saves some in de box fer de 'surance man and dem taxes. Den us gives some to our church and it ain't narry a cent left.

"Chile, dar comes my little bantam hen wid seven baby bantams. Let me git her, I never meant fer her to git outin dat dry place. I had her under de house. Lawd, have mercy Jesus, but I has a time. When dem bantams gits bigger I'll give you a pair." She sings, "Carry me to de Promise Land, Lawd, Carry me to de clouds whar de angels will grab me up." Then she claps her hands and exclaims, "Dat's my life, Lawd, Singin' Praises."